

**F/O Harold Kenneth
Coates 130651 RAFVR**

Harold Coates was a Lancaster pilot who was killed whilst trying to get his crew and damaged aircraft back to England following a raid on Berlin.



He and his crew were on their 12th operation with 49 Squadron at RAF Fiskerton when they joined a force of 316 Lancasters and 4 Mosquitos to attack the German city on the night of 3/4 September 1943. During the bomb-run his aircraft, JB126, is believed to have been hit by a flare before it was damaged by the city's formidable flak defences, damaging both wings and causing the aircraft's fuel tanks to leak.

The route back from the raid was across north Germany, over the Baltic and along the Swedish coast, before turning west across the northern tip of Denmark. By the time the aircraft was over the North Sea it became clear that JB126 didn't have enough fuel to make it back and a distress call was sent. With misty conditions across the sea, Harold had to abort the first ditching attempt before the Lancaster made a heavy impact on the sea about 15 miles off Blyth on the Northumberland coast.

Harold may have been incapacitated in the landing as he was unable to get clear before the Lancaster broke up and sank. The other six crew members did get into the water and five made it into a survival dinghy, while the flight engineer was unable to reach them and drowned. Later, a searching aircraft spotted the dinghy but by the time the Air Sea Rescue launch arrived three crewmen had died of exposure.

Harold's body was never found and he is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial. Born in Peru, he was the 25-year-old son of William and Grace Coates (née Smith).

The others who died were the flight engineer Sgt. John Sacre, navigator Sgt. Henry Jack (whose brother would later be killed in a 1667 Heavy Conversion Unit Halifax that crashed in April 1944), wireless operator Sgt. Clarence Kendrew and rear gunner Sgt. George Pawson. The survivors were the bomb-aimer Sgt. Leslie Underwood and mid-upper gunner Sgt. Raymond Nelson RAAF.

Harold's name can be found on IBCC panel 021.

Sources: 49 Squadron Association/The Berlin Raids by Martin Middlebrook.